Stories of the Town

Queer Result of Bobby's Love Affair...Tales of Human Interest

IT was perfectly natural that I should have fallen in love with Kitty Floyd. All the fellows in our town have done so in the natural course of events. They couldn't help it, I suppose. She is by far the prettiest girl anywhere around—even my sister, who is a dear friend of Kitty's, admits that—and as for character and intellect, well she has 'em to burn. But when you've said all that you have only begun to enumerate Kitty's charms, and if you don't know Kitty you can't understand. As old Du Maurier said, "How can a man describe peaches to a man who has only known apples?" Then, too, when a fellow is misunderstood and treated like a kid at home it is a relief to be talked to seriously by a woman of the world like Kitty. She was "Miss Kitty" to me for a good many years, but when I came home that winter from college on account of my eyes we became great pals, and I was over at her house, which is next door to ours, pretty constantly. Seated on the big couch in front of the library fire, with her yellow head against a red cushion, Kitty would talk to me about souls and mind reading and all sorts of deep subjects like that. Then one evening when I told her how awfully much I loved her, and couldn't live without her, she looked very serious and somewhat startled for a moment and then she laughed. Not mockingly, you understand, but in her whole-souled way, which it would do your heart good to hear. A great artist might succeed in painting Kitty, but the picture would be incomplete, for no artist could paint her laugh. She has a little scarlet, scalloped mouth and her laugh is the most musical sound I ever listened to. "Oh, no, Bobby," she said. "I'm going to continue to be a bachelor girl, so of course I can't marry you," and then she laughed again.

I had an idea. "Well, can't you be engaged to me?" I asked. Oh, yes; she could do that easily enough.

"Engaged people always kiss each other," I said.

"I'm sure I would just as soon kiss you, Bobby dear," said Kitty, and she did so, but in a way that somehow made me feel about ten years old. However, I set it down as Kitty's way, and that night at the supper table I announced to the assembled family, "I'm an engaged man."

"An engaged what?" said my sister, Being five years older than I she has a nasty way of ignoring the fact that I have grown up.

"— to Kitty," I went on.

My sister shrieked. "She is ages older than you are. Why, Kitty is twenty-seven years old if she's a day," she said.

My mother looked anxious. She never quite approved of Kitty. "Kitty is so, so pronounced," she said. My older brothers, who had both been through the Kitty fever, looked at me with varying expressions of pity and interest. "Kitty is delicious!" said my father, and so it was settled.

The next morning I bought the largest diamond ring I could afford. It cost me just the price father had given me for a new riding horse, but it seemed to me that Kitty was worth it. After that we became chummier than ever. We golfed and walked and danced and drove together, but most of all we talked together. We had one topic of conversation which never failed us, and that was the man who lived on the other side of Kitty's. He was a newcomer, a widower, and reputed to be vastly rich. Kitty detested him. She has a sharp tongue and directed its invectives against Mr. Guinnip, which was the rich widower's name, in a way which afforded us both much amusement.

"I hate those big, dark, solemn-looking men," she would obesrve when she saw him drive past in his smart runabout. As I am slight and blond and said to be cheerful looking, her observations pleased me. At another time she would say that Mr. Guinnip had the manners of a plowboy and she was sure he had driven his wife into an untimely grave by his ungovernable temper.

I was forced to leave Kitty for a week and go to Cincinnati on business for father. I hated to do it, but of course a fellow feels important to be sent on big law business like that, so I really forgot to worry about Kitty while I was gone. You may imagine that it was something of a shock when I drove home from the station to see Kitty alighting from Mr. Guinnip's aforesaid smart trap and run into the house followed by the owner thereof. Directly after supper I went over to Kitty's. I never remember to have seen her so radiant, and her talk was all of Mr. Guinnip. "Oh, Bobby," she ran on, "he is a millionaire and has seven servants in his house and has an automobile and a private car and goes to Europe every summer and really he's awfully intellectual and interesting when you really know him, and, er (irrelevantly), I am led to believe that he wants to get married."

"Well," I said, "I hope he will find some girl willing to marry such a disagreeable, cross-grained, ugly old man as himself." I had always considered Guinnip rather a good sort of fellow myself, but I was quoting Kitty's language."

"Why, he's nothing of the sort," said Kitty, hotly, "besides, I detest handsome men." Now as I am distinctly good looking, that was unkind of Kitty.

"He is old," I said.

"A very proper age," said Kitty, witheringly. "In short," she went on, "I have every reason to believe that he intends to ask some one to marry him;" here Kitty surveyed the rosette on her slipper and twirled Mr. Guinnip's roses in her fingers—"to—to ask me."

Now I leave it to anyone if that wasn't pretty rough on me. If Kitty had acted differently, I should have behaved decently myself, but her cool audacity made me furious.

"I'll have you to know that you're engaged to me," I said, sternly.

"But I never promised to marry you," she said.

"You promised either to marry me or remain a bachelor girl, didn't you?"

"Well, I can break the engagement if I want to," she said, beginning to get mad herself.

"Not on your life," I said, coolly.

"How are you going to prevent it?"

"Easiest thing in the world. I'll just tell Guinnip all the nice complimentary things you have been saying about him this fall, and I want to assure you that your chances of becoming Mrs. Guinnip will be pretty slim." It was coarse, I'll admit, but I was driven to do it.

"Oh Bobby, you couldn't, you wouldn't," she said with real terror in her voice.

"I easily could, and most assuredly would," I said decidedly. "Guinnip drops into father's office every day, and all I have to do is to drop him a few hints. He is the vainest man alive (that much was true) and you would stand about as much show with him as a snowflake in August. Besides," I went on, "things always sound so much more dreadful when they are repeated by a third person."

"Oh, Bobby, dear," wailed Kitty, "I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you the bull pup Brother Tom sent me if you will only promise not to interfere." Now I had begun to think myself something of a cad in the attitude I was taking, but her last remark steeled my heart. To be offered a bull pup as a sop for a broken heart was too much. I'd show Miss Kitty Floyd.

"I trusted you and you will betray me," she wailed. Her voice followed me as I strode home across the lawn.

After that I ceased to trouble Kitty very much, but I could see that she was afraid of me, for she ceased to encourage Guinnip's attentions. I heard my sister say: "I can't for the life of me imagine what Kitty is thinking of."

"In what respect?" I asked.

"Why, about Mr. Guinnip. All the girls in town have been making a dead set for him. He has ignored Kitty's existence until of late, but it is easy to see that she could have him now, hands down. She won't get such a chance again. I don't know what she is thinking of."

"And it is high time the giddy Kitty settled down, too," said my mother. "That little sister of hers is coming on, too."

"I think I have informed you," I remarked, "that Kitty is engaged to me."

"Pooh!" said my sister.

Kitty's mind was not at rest. I could tell that plainly enough. She would occasionally call me up over the telephone. "Is this Judge Merrivale's office? Well, is Mr. Robert there? Oh, is that you Bobby? This is Kitty. Oh, Bobby, can't you, won't you forget all the dreadful, dreadful things I said? Besides, I-I'm twenty-s-seven, and you don't want to marry me." I would reply, "Yes, I do, my own. What difference does a few years' discrepancy in our ages make? How is my little sweetheart this morning, anyway?" "Shut up over the telephone," Kitty would say with incredible vulgarity. "Well, who started this conversation, anyway?" I would rejoin, and then Kitty would hang up the receiver with a bang.

Matters stood at this crisis when one Indian summer evening I saw Kitty's sister Seraphina, home from the convent, leaning over the gate. I hadn't seen her for years, but I recognized her as a younger and prettier edition of Kitty. "Is your sister at home?" I inquired. She smiled at me seraphically. Evidently she knew nothing of the very strained relations that existed between her sister and me. Kitty came down the walk. Turning my back on Seraphina, I said to Kitty: "Look here, I don't care how soon you marry old Guinnip; I shan't do anything to interfere." Kitty executed a war dance and pranced into the house to prink for Guinnip's coming, I suppose. I leaned on the gate and talked to Seraphina.

A few weeks later I had the pleasure of walking down the aisle behind Kitty, with the lovely Seraphina, who was a vision in pink. I gave the bride a pearl heart for her wedding present, but when I saluted her in the vestry she only said: "Bobby, you are a beast."

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She was an attractive middle-aged woman, modestly but fashionably gowned. She carried a purse or card case and there was absolutely nothing in her appearance to betray her purpose. When the mistress of the house appeared at the door in answer to her ring, she smiled as one greeting an old and familiar acquaintance, and murmured:

"Why, how-do-you-do, Mrs. Jones."

Extending her hand she clasped the half-extended hand of Mrs. Jones, insinuated herself through the door and was well into the living room before Mrs. Jones realized just what had occurred, or had stopped racking her brain to recall where, if ever, she had met her unexpected caller and who on earth she might be.

"I was over to see Mrs. Smith this morning," resumed the caller, naming one of Mrs. Jones's friends, and calmly seating herself as she did so. "Mrs. Smith is very much interested in the new study circle that is being formed to take up a systematic study of art, literature and history this winter and she thought that you would be interested too, and asked me to call and explain the thing to you. The circle—" and here followed a line of palaver, poured forth in a steady stream that fascinated the victim and gave her no time to think or get in a word edgewise. Something attracted Mrs. Jones's attention to the window and when she looked around an instant later her caller held a book which she had produced from a capacious pocket in her petticoat in that instant. Then the truth dawned on Mrs. Jones—she was in the hands of a book agent! It was not her first experience. She had met up with agents and book agents before, but she had never been against this particular brand and in the face of such magnificent nerve was defenseless and could not summon the courage even to attempt to repel the attack.

Just what transpired in the next thirty minutes was learned by Mr. Jones across the dinner table that evening.

"You can't guess what I am going to do this winter, dear," was the way the story commenced.

"Dear" couldn't guess—he had long since learned that he couldn't if he would, and that it would be "perfectly horrid" of him to do so if he could, so he asked for particulars.

"Well, you know that I think I waste so much time that might be turned to real profit," the tale went on. "I've been planning every winter to take up some line of study that would be pleasant and really worth while, so I've joined a study circle."

"Dear" smiled.

"Now, it isn't a foolish little club for gossip and that sort—it's the real thing." And her ingenuous dropping into a slang was both refreshing and enthusing.

"What's the entrance fee?" Dear was practical and a bit worldly wise, you see.

"There's no entrance fee, and the instruction doesn't cost a cent, but—of course, I have to get some books." Then she finished with a rush: "We haven't the reference books in our library that I just have to have, and I've bought the books, and they'll be here to-morrow, and they have perfectly lovely bindings and engravings, and I remembered what you said and didn't sign my name to anything, and I only have to pay $2 down and $2 a month for—"

"For the rest of your natural existence," finished "Dear."

"Don't be horrid! Of course, not that long. It'll only be—well, I've forgotten just how many months, but it isn't long, and I'll never miss the money—just a nickel a day, with an occasional dime. And it doesn't cost you a cent, mister, for I shall pay for it myself."

The change from "Dear" to "Mister" is significant in that particular household, and the head of the establishment hastened to get things back to the "Dear" basis. He learned that the agent had given every assurance that would satisfy the most skeptical, that his wife would not have to take the books if she decided she didn't want them after all, laughed heartily at the artifices that had been practiced upon his susceptible better half, and was so "nice" about it that in the end he received his reward in a burst of confidence.

"I wouldn't have ordered the books without first talking it over with you, dear, but I just had to," she explained. "I told the woman that I wanted to see you before making up my mind, but she said in the sniffiest tone, 'It's a pity a married woman can't spend a paltry 5 cents a day without consulting her husband about it,' and I just wanted to let her know that I had some independence and could do as I pleased, so I told her quietly that after all I—'with the emphasis on the pronoun'—had decided to take the books, and that she might put my name down. But I didn't sign my name."

The books came promptly next day, Mrs. Jones made the first payment, and then, in fifteen minutes, discovered that she had been deluded and that the books weren't what she wanted, nor what she thought she was getting when she gave the order. A humbled but indignant wife greeted "Dear" that evening. He received the tale of trouble sympathetically, never once said or intimated, "I told you so," and was so irreproachable in his bearing as to make himself solid for six months. He promised to do what he could to get his wife out of the difficulty, and was assured that if he did she would never, never again buy a single solitary thing without first consulting him. The upshot of the thing was that he visited the down-town office of the "company," had a stormy scene with the manager, was shown a contract signed by his wife's name, which he promptly pronounced a forgery, and was finally told that the matter would be investigated and that if the signature was not that of Mrs. Jones the books would be taken back and the first payment refunded. The next day the agent called again and tried to persuade Mrs. Jones that the books were just what she wanted, even if she didn't realize it, but Mrs. Jones was adamant and the agent left in tears. The man who delivered the books came a short time after, and, in anything but an amiable manner, handed over the $2 and removed the bone of contention.

Dinner was unusually good that evening, and "Dear" learned so many nice things about himself that he almost fell to wondering how any woman could help but love him! All of which goes to confirm the rumor that all's well that ends well, and that book agents, after all, have their uses.

The Lovers.

The sky above was tender blue,
And golden was the weather,
When down a path a foolish two
Went strolling on together.
Her little hand in his was tight
(With boldness well amazing),
And thus they sauntered, full in sight,
And every one a-gazing.

It matters not of things they talked
Prosaic, ordinary;
The fact was patent that they walked
A different language—very!
Perhaps, because their heads were turned,
They deemed themselves sequestered,
And thought they could not be discerned,
And by rude glances pestered.

"How silly! laughed the grass and breeze—
And kissed each other over;
"How silly!" scoffed the honey bees—
And straight caressed the clover;
"How silly!" piped the feathered tribe—
And fell to billing sweetly;
"How silly!" quoth we all, in gibe—
And envied them, completely!

—Edwin L. Sabin, in December Smart Set.

SIR WILFRED LAURIER, CANADIAN PREMIER

Sir Wilfred Laurier is quoted as having determined, in case the imperial authorities persist in the refusal which they gave some time ago for the publication of the correspondence between the Canadian and British governments relative to the consent of the Dominion to the recent arbitration, "to leave it to the electorate of Canada whether they shall govern themselves in the future or be ruled from Downing street."

Street Railway Claim Station

Constantly Filled with Articles Left by Absent Minded People on Street Cars...Forgotten Things Range from Pocketbooks to Babies

ALMOST everything from a hair pin to a baby is left in the street cars," said a street-car conductor the other day, after he had directed a portly woman in search of a market basket, to the claim station at the West Washington-street barns. "You would be surprised at the number of things we find in our cars. Stick pins, keys, handkerchiefs, books, bundles, gloves, pocketbooks and umbrellas are the most common articles forgotten by passengers. Now and then, though, there are some mighty funny things left in the cars—things that we can't handle. I remember not very long ago a woman left her baby on my car. How she did it I don't know, but she did and I tell you I had enough of babies that one time to last me the rest of my life. She got off the car down town some place—didn't notice where it was, but directly there was a terrible yellin' in the front part of my car and everybody seemed excited. I went up to investigate and found a little kid, red in the face and yellin' and screechin' like a young Apache. They told me its mother had forgotten it and that I would have to take charge of it till the car got back down town. Some motherly old woman tried to quiet it by bouncing it up and down in her arms and puckerin' up her wrinkled face and talkin' baby talk. It didn't do any good, for the kid yelled louder than ever and then everybody in the car got their finger in the pie and tried to stop its shoutin'. Finally they handed it to me. It was the first one I had ever had my hands on and it was like holding a wet dish rag. I guess I didn't hold it right or else squeezed it too tight, for it nearly split itself bawlin' and slobberin'. I noticed suddenly that the car had stopped and everybody seemed to be gettin' off and the first thing I knew I was alone in the car with that yellin' infant. I was utterly helpless and didn't know what to do more than a rabbit. Was afraid to let go of the kid with one hand to ring the bell, for it was all I could do to hold it with both, so we just stood still till the motorman came back to investigate. I tried to get him to hold it for a minute 'til I rang the bell, but he was on to my game and wouldn't come near me. The sight struck him kind of funny and he just leaned up agin the door of the car and howled. I began to get hot and the kid wigglin' and cryin' harder every minute. I didn't have sense enough to set it down on the seat; anyway I guess I was afraid to. I don't know how long we stood there, but suddenly a buggy come tearing up and a woman jumped out and rushed into the car and snatched the bundle out of my hands, calling me a mean old man or something like that. Then she blamed it all on to me and said she would have me reported. Said I had started the car before she got her baby out. That's women all over. No more babies for me."

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The conductor who has been in the business very long has conclusions of his own about the people who ride on street cars. In his opinion they are a pretty forgetful crowd. Scarcely a person that rides much but what forgets something now and then, and a whole lot of them try to forget their fares, said one street-car conductor of a facetious disposition. However, the things that are absent-mindedly left in the street cars, were they placed in one heap, would make an admirable old curiosity shop. A trip out to one of the claim stations of the company will readily convince one of this. Most of the things are claimed—especially if they are valuable—but there are lots of things that either the loser forgets to claim or forgets that he left on the street car. Handkerchiefs and gloves and baskets, mysterious bundles and empty pocketbooks, and a hundred and one trinkets, are stored at the stations. A basket of young chickens was once brought into one of the stations, having been left on the rear platform of a car. At another time three kittens were brought in, all with sore eyes, which had purposely been left on the car as the easiest way of getting rid of them. The conductors say that letters and money are most quickly called for. The losers of the letters seemed to think that their pages are perused at the claim stations, for they are always in a hurry to get hold of them, and then examine them suspiciously, as if to say, "I like your nerve."

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A market basket was brought to one of the stations not long ago which had a comical experience—at least to every one except the owner—who, upon the discovery that it was empty, flew into a mighty rage and tore around the station threatening to bring legal proceedings against the company and in addition to thrash a certain conductor until he was blue in the face. It was during the last week that the open cars were run that the incident occurred. It seems that the gentleman who belonged to the basket—or the other way, if you like—had made a special trip to market and purchased a half bushel of large, red apples. He boarded the open car well down town and fixed himself comfortably on the seat next to the screen on the off-side of the car, with his basket of apples between his feet. The car filled up with passengers and when it arrived at his street it was a mathematical problem almost for him to squeeze himself out along the seat—not to mention the half bushel of apples. A happy thought suddenly struck him and he straightway formed a compact with his next-seat neighbor, whereby as soon as he should get himself out of the car he would hurry around and the neighbor would hand the basket out to him under the screen. No sooner had the quick-witted gentleman stepped from the running board than the quick-armed conductor rang the bell and the car pulled away before the man from market could find his voice. Conductors are used to stinging remarks sent after them from passengers, so no hand stayed the progress of the car. The neighbor in whose care the apples had been left looked about guiltily. Some one remarked that the apples looked good. That ended it. The neighbor said he would see and he did. The juice fairly sizzled about his lips as he sank his teeth into one of the red cheeks and the rich cider smell became so keen that a man next to the neighbor said "go to" to his conscience and reached over and picked out the next biggest apple. In a few minutes the consciences of every person on the car had "gone to" and every one of the fifty people on the car, including the motorman and conductor, were munching juicy red apples. The basket, empty and bare, reached the claim station.

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There are many things left on the street cars that people would think it impossible to lose. Imagine losing your girl on the street car—deliberately forgetting her. It seems preposterous, but a conductor on the East Washington-street line says it was done. The young fellow boarded the car with his girl—it surely wasn't his best girl—and sent her inside while he stood on the rear platform and finished his cigar. It must have been a very bad one, for when the car came to his street, he calmly stepped off and turned homeward. The girl patiently rode on, thinking, no doubt, that her gallant was on the rear platform and would tell her when they arrived at the right street. However, when the car turned the curve at Central avenue, in Irvington, she sprang up horrified. All the conductor knew was that nobody was on the rear platform and he hadn't the least idea what had become of her beau. The girl had no money, so he was stuck for her fare back to where her sweetheart was. He was waiting there in an awful stew with a string of apologies that would reach around the monument.

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According to the conductors, young men who ride on the street cars keep an eagle eye out for handkerchiefs dropped by pretty young girls, for it is an excuse for an acquaintance—consequently few violet perfumed, lace-embroidered handkerchiefs reach the claim stations. Conductors become pretty well acquainted with their passengers just by their actions on the street cars. They can always point out the persons of absent minds, either by the things they leave on the car or the number of times they ride past their streets. Many people, one conductor said, cannot help leaving articles on the cars and take precautions against it. The story is told of one old man who has always with him an abundant supply of stickers bearing his name and address. Whenever he rides on the car he immediately attaches a sticker to all his possessions—himself included, no doubt. Everything that is purchased down town is also labeled with a sticker. Whenever any article is lost—as one at least is sure to be—the conductor holds it for the abstracted but wise old man.